

1 Peter 5, we'll be looking this evening at verses one through four. 1 Peter 5, verses one through four. Well, most recently we saw at the end of chapter four that the apostle Peter was addressing suffering. He moves from addressing suffering at the end of chapter four to talking about church leadership, the elders in particular. You have to ask yourself, what is the connection between suffering and going from that topic to the topic of church leadership?

Well, the reason is this, as goes the church leaders, so goes the church. In other words, Peter knows that if the elders of the church are not suffering well, it is unlikely that the members of the church will suffer well. Because the flock of God is going to look to her elders. And they're going to look to her elders especially in times of suffering. Because in times of suffering, we all look for someone as an example. And so he knows that that is where the flock of God is going to look in their suffering. They will look to their elders. And so he begins to exhort the elders in chapter five, that they might set a good example for the flock of God entrusted to them.

Well, with this in mind, let us pray and ask God to bless the reading and preaching of his word. Dear Heavenly Fathers, we come to 1 Peter 5, verses one through four. We pray that as you dropped down your spirit in sovereign mercy, at the end of Acts 10, you would send him forth in sovereign mercy this evening, that the word would be read, preached, and heard, not merely in the flesh, but in the spirit. We pray this in Christ's name, amen. Acts chapter 5, verses 1 through 4. Remember, beloved, we are reading the very words of God.

So I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you. not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Well, thus ends the reading of God's holy word. May he bless now the proclamation of it to our lives. Well, there are two offices in Christ's church. two continuing offices in Christ Church. The two continuing offices in Christ Church are elders and deacons.

But within the office of elder, there are two orders or functions. These two orders or functions are known as teaching elders and ruling elders. They are equal in authority, but they simply have different stresses, different emphases. The teaching elder does the bulk, the primary load of the preaching and teaching. And the ruling elders do the primary bulk of the ruling alongside of the teaching elder, and the teaching elder rules as well. So I am a teaching elder. Rob, Wayne, and Jamie are ruling elders, but we have equal authority within Christ's church.

It's one office with two different functions. Now, the way that I have come to think of this so that I could understand it better myself is with the following analogy. I used to work in lawn care and my title was lawn care worker. Sometimes, when I worked in lawn care, I functioned as a weed eater. Other times, I functioned as a mower. But in both cases, I was a lawn care worker. But I had different functions at different times. And perhaps that's one way we can try to understand what we mean when we say that there is the office of elder, and within, underneath that umbrella term, you have teaching and ruling elders.

We get this idea from 1 Timothy 5, verse 17. Now the reason I say all of this this evening is because as we come to this passage, Peter, by divine inspiration, is addressing biblical elders. And so we have to understand this just at least a little bit before we dive into the sermon. So this evening we see in our text biblical elders.

And we see that the biblical elder has, in our text, three aspects. Three aspects of the biblical elder in our text. The biblical elder is Christ-centered. Second, the Biblical Elder is others-oriented. And third, the Biblical Elder is eternally-minded. So, Christ-centered, others-oriented, eternally-minded. So first, the Biblical Elder is Christ-centered.

You see this in verse one. So I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. Now it is significant, as Peter writes this first verse of chapter five, that he uses this word elder in the plural. He says, I exhort the elders among you. The significance of this being in the plural is that God does not ask one single person to lead his church on their own. There's always in Scripture, in the New Testament, a plurality of elders leading Christ's church. So, for example, you can go to Acts chapter 11, verse 30, or Acts chapter 14, verse 23, Or Acts 20, verse 17. Or Titus 1, verse 5. Or Philippians 1,

1. Or James 5,

14. And in all of these cases, you would see that it is a plurality of elders that are addressed. God does not ever ask a single person to be the sole leader in charge of his church on earth. Now, why doesn't God do this? First of all, we can say he simply says it, so that's why. He just tells us, that's why. He tells us the way he runs his church. But additionally, we could add to that, can't you immediately see the wisdom in not having a single person in charge of the church? Can't you immediately see the wisdom in this God-ordained structure of church government?

It prevents one man from having too much power. It keeps accountability within the leadership. It also allows a cumulative set of called, qualified men to come together and seek wisdom, counsel together before making decisions. So for example, now this would have ever happened in the past already multiple times, but for example, say I go to the session with what I think is a great idea. And this session lovingly informs me it's not such a great idea. Well, praise the Lord, because we're there to help one another think wisely and make, by God's grace, the best possible decisions we can on behalf of His church.

So God has ordained that His church be led by qualified elders, a plurality of elders, never a single man. And this is simply where we get our word presbytery from. It's from this word elder. Presbytery. A Presbyterian church is an elder-led church, a plurality of elders leading a church.

But we see in the text that these elders must be Christ-centered. Peter calls himself a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ. Now when we read that the elder is a witness of the sufferings of Christ in verse one, that Peter is this way, and that the elders should be following his example, this doesn't mean that the elder has to personally have witnessed the sufferings of Christ. If that were a qualification for being an elder, there would be no elders today, or the only elders alive today would be 2,000 years old, because they would have had to witness the sufferings of Christ. But what he does mean is this. is that the elder must be like Peter in that he looks to the sufferings of Christ by faith. He is a witness to what Christ did on the cross by faith. The elder must be a man who sees that he needs Christ crucified. The elder must be a man who knows that Christ is a great savior. because he knows that Christ has saved him.

And the only one who could save him is a great savior, because he is the greatest sinner he's ever met. You need to believe that about yourself. All of us do, but elders in particular. We need to realize that we are the greatest sinners in every room where we step. And that's why we need to be a witness to Christ's sufferings by faith, because we need that great Savior of the Scriptures to die for our sins. The elder must say with the Apostle Paul, he loved me and gave himself up for me.

So you must be Christ-centered, but you must not only be centered on what Christ did for you in the past. The biblical elder is Christ-centered also in that he looks to what Christ is going to do for him in the future. You see there halfway through verse one, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. You see in this that the elder is looking back to what Christ has done for him, but he's also looking forward to what Christ will do for him at his return. You could think of it like this. He's looking in two directions or he's bi-directional. He's looking back to what Christ has done for him. He's looking forward to what Christ will do for him.

But why is all of this so indispensable for the biblical elder? Why is it indispensable for the biblical elder that he be Christ-centered? Well, because if you do not love Christ, you cannot love his sheep. He will care for Christ's sheep best who loves Christ most. The biblical elder who loves Christ most will care for Christ's sheep best.

Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter in John chapter 21 after Peter had just a few days earlier denied that he even knew Christ three times, and then after his resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ comes to Peter, and he asks Peter three times, Peter, do you love me? Each time Peter responds in the affirmative, and Jesus Christ responds to him after Peter says essentially yes, Jesus responds, feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. But why does Jesus ask Peter three times, do you love me, before he commissions him to shepherd the flock of God? He does that because Jesus knows that unless Peter loves Jesus, he cannot shepherd Jesus's people. He does that because he knows that it will only be out of a heart that deeply loves Christ that he will be enabled to love Christ's sheep well. He does this because he wants Peter to be a good, God-honoring, Christ-exalting, Spirit-filled shepherd.

Now to whom, I ask, does this exhortation apply this evening to be Christ-centered? Well, surely it applies to all of us, doesn't it? Don't all of us need to love Christ well that we might care for others well? That's true for all of us. But especially in this verse, the focus is the elder. So I ask our elders here this evening, as I've had to ask myself, do you love Christ? Do I love Christ? How, if you answer that yes, will you shepherd the flock well? How will it shape your shepherding?

Well, if you love Christ, you will shepherd the flock with humility because you will remember how much you need Jesus Christ. If you love Christ, you will shepherd the flock with tenderness because you'll remember how tenderly God has dealt with you in Jesus Christ. If you love Christ, you will shepherd the flock in the fear of God, knowing that you must give an account for the souls that are entrusted to you. If you love Christ, you will also shepherd the flock with conviction. You will not fear man, but you will fear God. The man who loves Christ in his shepherding is gentle towards the sheep, but also courageous as a lion, simultaneously. because he cares deeply for the flock, but he also fears his God and knows that he is the one to whom he must give an account.

And if you love Christ's shepherds this evening, you will always be doing what you can to the best of your ability to point them to Jesus. You will always be wanting to point them to Jesus, whether it's over a meal, a house visit, a hospital visit, a short note, a text message, Whenever you have an opportunity, you will strive to do what you can to point the flock of God to Christ because that's where your heart is. You should smell of the aroma of Christ when you shepherd the flock as an elder.

They should leave your presence thinking they smell something of Christ because they spent time around you. And how will you get there? You get there by spending time with Jesus when no one sees. That's how you start to smell like Christ. It's when no one knows you're doing it. It's when no one sees you and you're alone in the early hours of the morning, the late nights when you wake up, you spend time with Jesus. And then when you go spend time with the flock, you will smell like Christ.

And it is out of this Christ-centeredness that Peter moves so organically and understandably to being others-oriented. Doesn't it make sense that he would move from being Christ-centered to being others-oriented? That's exactly what he does in the text in verses two and three. So let us consider our second point. The biblical elders is others-oriented, verses two and three. Shepherd the flock of God that is among you. He begins here, exercising oversight, verse two. Notice a few things about these opening words. Notice whose flock it is that the shepherd, the elder, is called to shepherd. Whose flock is it? It is not man's flock. It is not Mac's flock or Wayne's flock or Jamie's flock or Rob's flock. The flock that you are called to shepherd is God's flock. You are called to shepherd God's most prized possession. Think about it. God owns the heavens and the earth. God owns all things visible and invisible. God owns the angel Gabriel. God owns the archangel Michael, the archangel Michael. But God did not purchase any of these with his precious blood like he did the flock of God that he has entrusted to you. The sheep of whom you are called to care are more splendid in the sight of God than the angels of heaven. And he has entrusted you to care for these, his most prized possession.

This flock is described as among you at the start of verse two. This means that the elders are especially called to care for the flock of God right in front of them. That's not to say that we don't care for the church across the street or our brothers and sisters around the world, but there's a special exhortation to the elders to care for the specific flock that God has put right in front of them. And these words also imply, among you also implies, that you cannot shepherd the flock of God effectively from a distance.

You cannot shepherd them well at arm's length. You must be involved in their lives. You must make an effort to be around them and involved where you are able. The shepherd of a flock can't shepherd his sheep if he's not in the field with them. And the shepherd of God's flock can't shepherd the sheep well if he is not doing what he can to be involved in their lives. The shepherd needs to visit his allotted flock. The shepherd needs to make an effort to be praying for them.

He needs to be caring for their souls. Think about how far Christ has come to make you one of his sheep. Shouldn't we be willing to make an effort to follow his example and go the extra mile to care for the sheep that he has entrusted to us? Christ saved us from alongside of us. Are we going to try to shepherd his sheep from a distance? But we also have an authority who are elders, exercising oversight. You see that in these words, exercising oversight. You see that we have an authority. But the elders, while they have this authority, are not to be tyrannical or authoritarian. This authority is to be exercised in love for the good of the flock. We read here that it's not to be domineering over those in their charge.

It could happen that a zealous shepherd who truly means well, he has pure motives, a zealous shepherd can become domineering over the sheep. And the shepherd must always remember that he is not called to be a cowboy driving cattle, but a shepherd herding sheep. And that attitude ought to be known by the way he carries himself in his calling as an elder. We then read that it's not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. The elder must not be slothful in his calling. You can see this by the words willingly and eagerly. He must be eager and willing to serve the flock.

As Jeremiah 48.10 says, cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with slackness.

The elder also must not do his work for shameful gain. For those who are paid, that would be me in this room, we must not do this for filthy lucre. We must not do it for money. But you can seek gain in lots of other ways too. And there's a warning here that we not seek the position of elder, the title of elder for shameful gain. You don't do it to be praised, to be thought well of by others. You don't seek the title of elder for yourself. And if you seek it for yourself, you disqualify yourself from being worthy of the title of an elder. The elder must resist the urge to seek praises from man. He must not long to serve others so that he might be praised by them. He leads out of love for Christ and love for souls, not love for self.

We also see that the elder, he concludes with these words, but being an example to the flock at the end of verse three. But being an example, being examples to the flock. Again, this implies closeness to the flock. You can't be examples to people who can't see you. So we have to be involved, that way people can see our lives, and by God's grace, we can be an example.

The truth is, whether the elder likes it or not, and Dr. Wingard would stress this often in our pastoral theology classes, whether you like it or not, you are in a position of authority, and people are going to follow you. It's a non-negotiable, it will happen. People are going to look to you naturally as leaders, and they're going to follow you, and this is why our example is so important to the flock because when we go off the rails morally, they're likely to follow our lead. And if you go off the rails doctrinally, they're likely to follow and embrace your error in doctrine. So all of these descriptions for how the elder ought to shepherd the flock, find their example though, their fulfillment where? In Christ, don't they?

That's what will help spur, stir up the elder to do his calling to the best of his ability by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because he'll remember that Christ took on his role to shepherd the flock, not for shameful gain, but willingly and eagerly. He left His Father's throne above, not begrudgingly to make us His sheep, but willingly and eagerly to make us His sheep. And so when we follow His example by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, we're just simply trying to do for others what Jesus has done for us. Now, of course, we fall far short, we're imperfect, unlike, of course, Jesus Christ, but that's really what the shepherd is called to do, the elder is called to try to do his best for others, as Jesus has done for him. He wants to do things not for shameful gain, but willingly and eagerly. He doesn't want to domineer over the others. He wants to willingly give himself up for others. He's others-centered because Christ was others-centered for him. And then in closing and briefly, our third point this evening, a biblical elder is eternally minded. And we'll be very brief here, but he's eternally minded, verse four.

We read there, and when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. The elder is a shepherd, but he is also a sheep himself. He remembers that he is under the chief shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. And he does his calling, as we've already stressed in verse one, not only looking back, but looking forward to Christ's return, as you see here in this verse.

He does not shepherd the flock for a crown in this life. He shepherds the flock for the crown of glory that awaits him when Christ returns. He shepherds the flock with eternity in mind. He shepherds the flock thinking about heaven and hell. He shepherds the flock thinking about sin and salvation. He shepherds the flock not just thinking about worldly things, but eternal matters.

And what do you suppose the faithful shepherd will do with his crown of glory that you read about here? The faithful elder, what will Jamie and Rob and Wayne, what will they do with their crown of glory on the day when Christ returns for their faithful shepherding? What will they do? I'll tell you what they'll do. Same thing the 24 elders are doing right now. According to Revelation chapter four, Remember what they're doing? They're taking their crowns and they're casting them at the throne of God's feet.

Why? Because the biblical elder knows that he's nothing. He knows that insofar as he has done anything well in his shepherding, it was all the grace of God at work in him. He'll take the crown that God gives him and he will throw it right back at God's feet because it's a crown of God's grace. God is simply crowning his grace at work in the lives of his elders. So elders, do you here this evening want to receive that great crown of grace at the day of Christ's return? Do you want to receive it so that you can take it off and say, here you go, all the glory belongs to you. That's shepherding with eternity in mind, wanting to give your all so that you might praise God on the day of his visitation.

Well, today we have seen the biblical elder is Christ-centered, others-oriented, and eternally minded. But I want to address everyone here who's not an elder for a moment. Don't you want to see that more in us who are elders this evening? Don't you want to see that more in my life, in our lives who are elders?

You have a responsibility too. Please pray for us because the truth is we can't do it. That's just the fact, we can't do it. We need your prayers so that we might begin to do that which Peter is writing to us to do by divine inspiration in 1 Peter 5. Let us pray.

Almighty God, we thank you so much that ultimately Christ is the shepherd of our souls, that ultimately he is the good shepherd in whom we find refuge. God, we pray that those of us who have the title of elder would seek to live in accordance with the qualifications for the elder. We pray that more and more we, who are elders, would be Christ-centered. That when no one knows, we would make an effort to be in your word. When no one knows we're pouring out our souls, we pray that we would pour out our souls in prayer. Lord, we plead with you that we would never do these things for shameful gain. We pray that you would forgive us wherever we do these things, that we might receive a pat on the back in this life.

Oh Lord, we thank you for all the encouragement we do get here at Second Presbyterian Church. We praise you for those encouraging words and the fact that we get to shepherd such an encouraging flock. But God, we pray that we would never do it for that reason ultimately, but do it for the glory of God and of love for Christ in our very hearts.

And Father, we also pray that we would be more and more others centered. Lord, I pray that you would grant us grace to think of a way that we might grow and mature in the service of others. And Lord, we pray that we would be eternally minded, remembering that this life is fleeting, but the work which we are called to do will last forever.

And oh God, we pray for all who are here, that they would be praying for us, that they would be asking God to make us better shepherds. as we together with them look to our great Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer of God's elect. It's in his name that we pray, amen.